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ABSTRACT

Data were collected between July and November 1992 to identify ways in which the Ontario Basic Skills (OBS) and Formation de base de l'Ontario (FBO) programs had helped learners progress toward further training or employment. It also identified the partnerships and collaborative efforts within Conestoga College and beyond that added to the community as a whole and to the individual participant. Methodology included face-to-face interviews, phone calls, and questionnaires to past and present participants, college personnel, and community-based workers. The following recommendations were made: students should be tracked better after leaving to evaluate program effectiveness and modify it where necessary; the programs should continue to follow the methods of adult education; the college system should continue to recognize OBS and FBO as vital programs; there should be more communication among OBS and FBO programs; there should be more program modifications to meet needs of Native Peoples; colleges and program funders should identify groups and individuals not being served and develop strategies to close these gaps; and funding should be on a multiyear basis to ensure effective development and delivery of OBS and FBO programs. (Interview instruments, OBS Program funding to colleges, and background information are appended.) (YLB)

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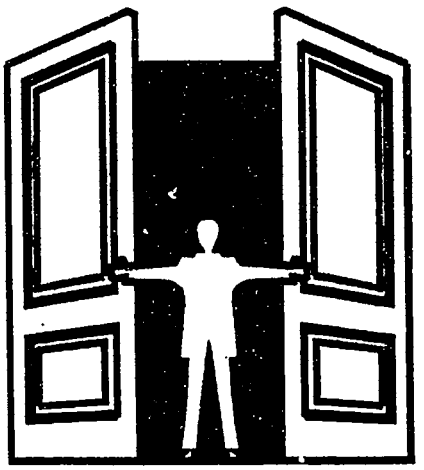
Creating Opportunities Through Basic Skills Training

A Study of the Ontario Basic Skills Program and its French-language Counterpart, Formation de base de l'Ontario

Andrea Leis



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Executive Summary

THE ONTARIO BASIC SKILLS PROGRAM (OBS) provides tuition-free basic skills training in English to adults at Ontario community colleges. Formation de base de l'Ontario (FBO) provides similar training in French for Ontario's Francophone population. Training includes the upgrading of reading, writing, and oral skills; math, science and technical skills; computer skills; and life and work adjustment skills. The program aims to meet the basic skill training needs of Ontario adults, with emphasis on serving women, Native Peoples, visible minorities, older workers, people with disabilities, and social assistance recipients who have less than Grade 12 education. Participants may be employed or unemployed.

This report describes the variety of ways the program helps learners progress toward further training or employment from the perspective of the learner, staff, the Ministry of Education, and the community.

Learners were interviewed in person and learners at all colleges were asked to complete questionnaires which asked what makes the program successful for them. Teachers are consistently identified as the most important factor leading to success. Learners also ranked the following factors as high in importance: "being in college", "my own motivation", "individualized program", "counsellors", and "other students." Most learners have very high regard for this program, which they see as giving them a "second chance." The special support allowances which help pay for transportation and child care are critical for some students' participation.

This report describes the variety of ways the program helps learners progress toward further training or employment from the perspective of the learner, staff, the Ministry of Education, and the community.

Many students completing their OBS or FBO program go on to postsecondary programs at the same college. OBS and FBO programs are working on coordinating curricula to help make this transition effective. This is one of the strengths of offering OBS and FBO at colleges.

Staff consider the flexible government guidelines essential for the program's success. They are able to respond to individual needs and take the whole adult into account. In addition, the capacity to

access college support services such as counsellors and resource centres allows teachers to reach students who may not have had successful school experiences in the past.

The Literacy Branch of the Ministry of Education sees this program, which is offered at all 23 of Ontario's colleges, as a major component of its access programs and a major deliverer for basic skills.

Working with adults who have multiple needs has led to the creation of partnerships and collaborative efforts with other institutions and community programs such as the John Howard Society, boards of education, and public housing authorities.

OBS and FBO provide a model for adult upgrading which emphasizes a high degree of collaboration among providers. OBS programs have been identified to pilot jobsOntario pre-employment program models. Similarly, OBS and FBO may be able to provide a model for the programs OTAB[1] anticipates.

Recommendations

Based on the record of the OBS and FBO programs, the following recommendations can be made:

1. There should be better tracking of students after they leave OBS or FBO in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and modify it where necessary. One way would be to use the same student identification number throughout the college system from OBS through postsecondary programs.

2. OBS and FBO programs should continue to follow methods of adult education, that is, to consider the needs of the whole adult and plan programs and services accordingly.

3. The college system should continue to recognize OBS and FBO as vital programs. Regional OBS/FBO working groups should report to Heads of Access, a recently set up coordinating group within ACAATO[2], so these programs continue to be seen as integral parts of the college system.

[1] Ontario Training and Adjustment Board
[2] Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario

4. There should be more communication among OBS and FBO programs, especially about innovative models that meet the needs of marginalized students.

5. There should be more program modifications to meet the needs of Native Peoples.

6. To remain sensitive to community needs, colleges and program funders should identify groups and individuals not being served and develop strategies to close these gaps.

7. Funding should be on a multi-year basis to ensure effective development and delivery of OBS and FBO programs.

Acknowledgements

THIS REPORT DESCRIBES A VARIETY of OBS and FBO programs as experienced by the students, faculty, and administrators of the programs as well as by some of the people in their communities. I would like to thank these people for all the time they spent talking to me, answering questionnaires, and preparing "snapshots" of their programs. I also appreciate the opportunity provided by the Ministry of Education, Literacy Branch and the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario to learn about these programs.

Writing the report required significant whittling down of the material I collected. The examples used to document specific program qualities are by no means the only or the best ones in the system. I have tried to present a range of programs in terms of geographic representation, size, and people served. My apologies to any programs which feel underrepresented.

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the individual, not of the institution of which they are a part.

Andrea Leis
Project Coordinator
February 2, 1993

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Preface

THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT is to describe the variety of ways OBS and FBO programs have helped learners progress toward further training or employment. It also documents the partnerships and collaborative efforts within the college and beyond which have added to the community as a whole as well as to the individual participant.

Data were collected between July and November 1992 through face-to-face interviews, phone calls, and questionnaires to past and present participants, college personnel, and community-based workers. Interviews with personnel and participants in FBO programs were conducted in French, and French-language questionnaires were distributed in these programs. The electronic mail system (CoSy) to which all colleges are hooked up has allowed distance "conferencing" to take place as well.

The Ontario Basic Skills Program (OBS) provides tuition-free basic skills training in English to adults Ontario community colleges. Formation de base de l'Ontario (FBO) provides similar training in French for Ontario's Francophone population. Training includes the upgrading of reading, writing, and oral skills; math, science and technical skills; computer skills; and life and work adjustment skills. The program aims to meet the basic skill training needs of Ontario adults, with emphasis on serving women, Native people, visible minorities, older workers, people with disabilities, and social assistance recipients who have less than Grade 12 education. Participants may be employed or unemployed.

According to the College Standards and Accreditation Council Report, July 1992, OBS has the third largest program funding in the colleges following nursing and English as a Second Language (ESL).

Introduction

The belief that ordinary people have both an ability and a right to interpret their problems and be involved in solutions is a fundamental element in any development of non-formal education and the key to long-lasting solutions.

—Budd L. Hall, International Council for Adult Education

THE INTERVIEWS FOR THIS REPORT support this belief that "ordinary people" must be involved. Descriptions of personal experiences in OBS and FBO programs form the basis of the report. Statistics have been used to show numbers of participants, exit plans, and factors which students cite as having been important in making the program work for them. However, numbers don't show everything. As Lynne Wallace, OBS Coordinator at Cambrian College, put it, "Everyone who enters is a success, even those who may leave early. I knew a woman who left without completing the program but now has much better personal skills in dealing with family conflicts."

Hugh Armstrong, Director of Access and Assessment at the School of Communications and General Studies at Centennial College, considers OBS "an ideal college program ... whose goal is to educate students for career success." He distinguishes 'educate' from 'train' and 'career' from 'job' when he describes what goes on at Centennial. Though other directors may not use the same words, the sense of providing opportunities and giving a second chance to adults permeates the philosophy, curriculum, and outcomes of OBS and FBO programs. "It's set up with the client in mind, not the administrator," says Élise Beauregard, director of occupational training and continuing education at La Cité collégiale in Ottawa. "It's one of the best thought-out programs for the client." Lynne Wallace, OBS Coordinator at Cambrian College in Sudbury, says, "Without OBS, many of these people would not have made the changes in their lives." Across Ontario, students, administrators, teachers, and community workers echo this sentiment.

OBS is "an ideal college program...whose goal is to educate students for career success."

—Hugh Armstrong

THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO created the college system in 1965 to:

1. provide courses of types and levels beyond, or not suited to, the secondary school setting;

2. meet the needs of graduates from any secondary school program, apart from those wishing to attend university;

3. meet the educational needs of adults and out-of-school youth, whether or not they were secondary school graduates.[1]

As college programs evolved to meet the increased demand for upgrading by adults returning to school, so did the Ontario government's role in funding adult retraining programs.

The Technical Upgrading Program (TUP) was the precursor to OBS and FBO. TUP was aimed primarily at women who were interested in entering non-traditional trades and who required upgrading. There was also a focus on life skills such as time and stress management, resume writing and interview skills, and personal wellness. Funding for TUP was made available to colleges from the skills training division of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

In 1986, the Ministry of Skills Development was formed. Ontario Basic Skills (OBS) was announced as part of the Ontario Training Strategy on September 4, 1986 and implemented in November 1986. OBS was also included in the Government Plan for Adult Literacy, a separate but linked announcement made on September 6. Funding for OBS was increased to $20 million from TUP's budget of about $12 million.

OBS was given a wider mandate than TUP. The OBS program included life skills, basic academics, computer literacy, and hands-on training in non-traditional occupations. Both men and women were eligible, and the programs were more individually tailored than either the TUP or Basic Training for Skills Development (BTSD) model which many colleges were using. However, the

[1] Ontario Department of Education, *Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Basic Documents* (Toronto, June 1967)

expected duration of the program decreased from 52 weeks to 400 hours, or 16 weeks.

OBS had three main objectives:

1. To provide basic literacy and numeracy training to educationally disadvantaged adults;

2. To increase the access of those adults traditionally underrepresented in training; i.e. Aboriginal Peoples, visible minorities, older workers, the disabled, etc.;

3. To assist women interested in non-traditional occupations.

The initial OBS program guidelines stated that "a minimum of 20% of project funding must be directed to the delivery of literacy and numeracy skills at the basic level." (May 1987)

The flexibility of the program model has allowed creative use of its funding.

The program was to be available in French where the need was identified. In 1989, additional funding was provided to increase the provision of Formation de base de l'Ontario (FBO) in the colleges.

Special Support Allowances (SSA) were built into the program to reduce he "financial barriers of childcare, transportation and accommodation away from home, most common to a wide range of low income disadvantaged persons, to allow them more readily and fully to participate in the Ministry's Ontario Basic Skills Program." (Ministry Guidelines, September 10, 1986) Currently SSA is used for transportation and childcare.

Collaboration among colleges, boards of education, and community groups was a built-in expectation of the program.

In April 1990, Ontario Basic Skills moved from the Ministry of Skills Development to the Ministry of Education. According to the 1992 Ministry of Education Guidelines, Ontario Basic Skills (OBS) program/programme de formation de base de l'Ontario (FBO) provides "adults whose functional literacy and numeracy skills are less than grade 12 level, the necessary academic upgrading to improve their access to further skill training or employment."

OBS is offered at all 22 of Ontario's English-language Colleges

of Applied Arts and Technology; FBO is now offered by nine colleges, including the all-French La Cité collégiale in Ottawa. The program varies greatly from college to college, reflecting local needs and collaborative efforts with other organizations in the community.

Funding is provided to the colleges:

1. to increase the literacy, communications, mathematical and science skills of Ontario residents;

2. to increase the employability of displaced workers and social assistance recipients;

3. to increase the participation of women, Aboriginal Peoples, people with disabilities, members of visible minority groups, and people over the age of 45; and

4. to encourage women to enter trade and technical skill programs. (taken from OBS Program Guidelines, Ministry of Education, January 23, 1992)

OBS/FBO has been called "a value-added program."

The flexibility of the program model has allowed creative use of its funding. Different funding sources have been used successfully to create a patchwork of programs for adult students. Ollie Bakelaar, intake officer at Sir Sandford Fleming in Peterborough, claims that if a student is working hard, "we do everything we can to help you get through." Federally funded Basic Skills for Training Development (BTSD) and provincially funded Ontario Student Bursary (OSB) have been used in conjunction with OBS funds to help students reach their next step. "Nobody just 'leaves' the program, they leave with a plan," says Lynne Wallace of Cambrian College.

Special Support Allowances continue to play an integral role in the success of the program from the students' perspectives by providing travel and child care allowances. Many students wouldn't be able to manage without these allowances.

Though OBS/FBO cannot be used as an English- or French-as-a-second-language program, many colleges must address the needs of second-language students in terms of access to postsecondary programs and the labour market.

There is no longer a requirement that 20% of program funding be directed to delivery of literacy and numeracy skills at the basic level. Of the 18 colleges which responded to a set of written questions, 15 said that they do offer Level I instruction in their OBS program. When Level I instruction is not offered, referrals are made to other literacy programs such as the John Howard Society, community-based programs, labour adjustment initiatives, or the school board.

Collaborative efforts have developed to such a degree and with such creativity that OBS/FBO has been called "a value-added program." The interaction of the program with its community has created a synergy which this report is all about.

The Learner's Perspective

Who is the OBS/FBO student?

The guidelines state that to be eligible for OBS or FBO you must be a resident of and eligible to work in Ontario, over 25, and have less than a Grade 12 diploma. Exceptions to the age limit are allowed where there are no other appropriate training programs in that community.

The information in Table I, opposite, was collected by the Ministry of Education and shows trends in target group participation.

This Niagara student's letter speaks for many OBS students who were interviewed:

> I'm 32 years old and a single mother of three children. Until I came back to school my life did not have much hope for the future. Living off the system and knowing that I would never get anywhere in life I felt very defeated. Having come out of a ten-year marriage where I had been treated as a nobody, any self-confidence or self-worth I ever had was lost.

She went to the Women's Employment Support Program where she was given a Niagara College equivalency test and referred to the college's OBS program:

> The next step was contacting someone at the OBS program. It took a week to muster up some courage and make the call. I was given an appointment for the beginning of the following week. All I had to bring was myself and my results on the equivalency test. I didn't score too highly on the test and I felt so embarrassed to let anyone see it.
>
> Petrified I arrived for my appointment. I was warmly welcomed by Donna, one of the counsellors. She efficiently prepared a schedule for me and informed me that I could begin immediately. For a moment I felt in a state of panic. I knew for me there was no turning back. Immediately seemed too soon. Therefore I told Donna I would start at the beginning of the next week. My mind was boggled with questions like: "Will I ever be able to learn anything?" "Will I ever get to a grade twelve level?" etc.
>
> Monday finally came and I was still fearful but somehow I knew this was the first step of my future. As I arrived I was warmly

greeted by the teacher and students. I felt accepted and I knew this was where I belonged. I have found the teachers very helpful and caring which has been an encouragement to me. I find my attitude so much more positive and my self-confidence has greatly improved. I'm enjoying school and finding it very motivating. I also feel this will have a positive effect on my children and maybe it will always influence them in regards to the importance of education in their lives.

I am enjoying the program and wished we had more time for it. I understand there are budgets and guidelines that must be followed but I also know that this program is needed by many of us. I sure hope this program will continue and its success will lead to a more improved program.

"My self-confidence has greatly improved."

—Student, Niagara College

OBS and FBO students are men and women from a wide range of backgrounds—laid-off miners, injured loggers, single mothers with no job experience, adults with disabilities who are learning

Table I - OBS/FBO Program Participation

Participants	**1988-89**	**1989-90**	**1990-91**	**1991-92**
Female	9,996	8,841	8,699	8,353
%	64%	63%	60%	54%
Male	5,623	5,184	5,800	7,116
%	36%	37%	40%	46%
Total	**15,619**	**14,025**	**14,499**	**15,469**
Client Profile Information (% submitting)	90%	89%	85%	64%
Age				
Less than 25	17%	17%	18%	20%
26 to 44	73%	73%	72%	70%
45 and over	10%	9%	10%	10%
Disabled	16%	17%	17%	9%
Visible Minorities	20%	19%	20%	15%
Francophones	10%	10%	11%	12%
Native Peoples	5%	5%	5%	4%
Social Assistance Recipients (SARs)	28%	30%	33%	35%
Employed	40%	39%	37%	24%
Unemployed	58%	59%	61%	76%

Notes:
- The low number of Trainee profile forms for 1991–92 is associated with the implementation of a new management information system.
- The low proportion of "Disabled" in 1991–92 may result from a change in the wording of the related question.
- OBS client profiles vary widely by region; for example, in 1991–92, in the Northern Region, OBS clients consisted of:
  - 3% Visible Minorities
  - 29% Francophone
  - 10% Native People
  - 7% Immigrants

  In the Central Region, OBS clients consisted of:
  - 46% Visible Minorities
  - 3% Francophone
  - 1% Native People
  - 48% Immigrants

Source: Ministry of Education

to become more self-sufficient, self-employed businessmen whose businesses have failed in the recession, frustrated hairdressers, and hopeful nurses who left high school before graduation. In short, there is no *one* OBS or FBO student. Yet when asked, "What makes the program work for you?", one of the responses often heard was, "The support of the other students; meeting other students with the same problems helped me to feel that I wasn't so different anymore." The goal of improving one's life is probably the unifying factor. At a meeting with a group of students from Cambrian College in Sudbury, Sherry H. said, "OBS helped me to get out of a rut."

"The main reasons why I feel that this program worked so well for me are: it allowed me to be able to take some time off when needed, to care for my children when they became ill, and then start back up where I left off; it also encouraged me to do the school work because it was in a classroom and not on my own in my spare time; you could go through the material as quickly as you were able to understand it, making it possible to advance at a faster rate than going back to high school; as well the teachers were all very helpful and explained things clearly."

—Lambton College OBS Graduate

Believing that "things can be better" is the energy which motivates adult students to re-enter school, especially when their first school experience may not have been very positive. Balancing school work and family responsibilities, and sometimes a job as well, requires a lot of motivation!

J. started OBS in April 1991. He earned good money working in a mine until he was injured and couldn't do any heavy labour. When he began OBS he tested at the level of a "functional illiterate" (his words). J. considers the program "a good growing experience" which gave him "self-confidence and hope." J. was registered to enter Canadore's general arts and science in September 1992 and hopes to be able to work with troubled youth.

A man who had come to Sudbury from Quebec tested as illiterate when he entered Cambrian College's FBO program. He was directed toward carpentry but was very frustrated. "I didn't come here to learn carpentry," he told coordinator Marie-Paule Forest.

"What do you want to do then?" Forest asked. "I want to be a drug counsellor." FBO staff got in touch with the drug counselling program at McMaster University in Hamilton and found out what courses he would need to take to enter. He completed the requirements and went to McMaster. Since graduation from McMaster he has been working as a drug counsellor in Sudbury.

What makes OBS work for you?

Questionnaires were developed based on interviews held with students in July. The questionnaire asked students, "What makes OBS work for you?" Eleven factors derived from previously held interviews were listed. Students were asked to rank the top five in numerical order, using 1 as the first most important factor. Questionnaires were delivered to all 23 colleges. The FBO questionnaire is slightly different to reflect the different criteria associated with it. Bear in mind that some of the factors may be relevant to some but not all programs. For example, some colleges offer life skills workshops as an option and some programs integrate workshop materials into the regular class time and there are some programs which do not offer life skills information other than through the context of random classroom discussions.

The most popular responses are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Teachers are consistently listed in the top five factors. Being in college, my own motivation, individualized program, counsellors, and other students were the next most often listed. A large number of FBO students listed the opportunity to study in French as a major factor.

A., a graduate of the Lambton OBS program, wrote,

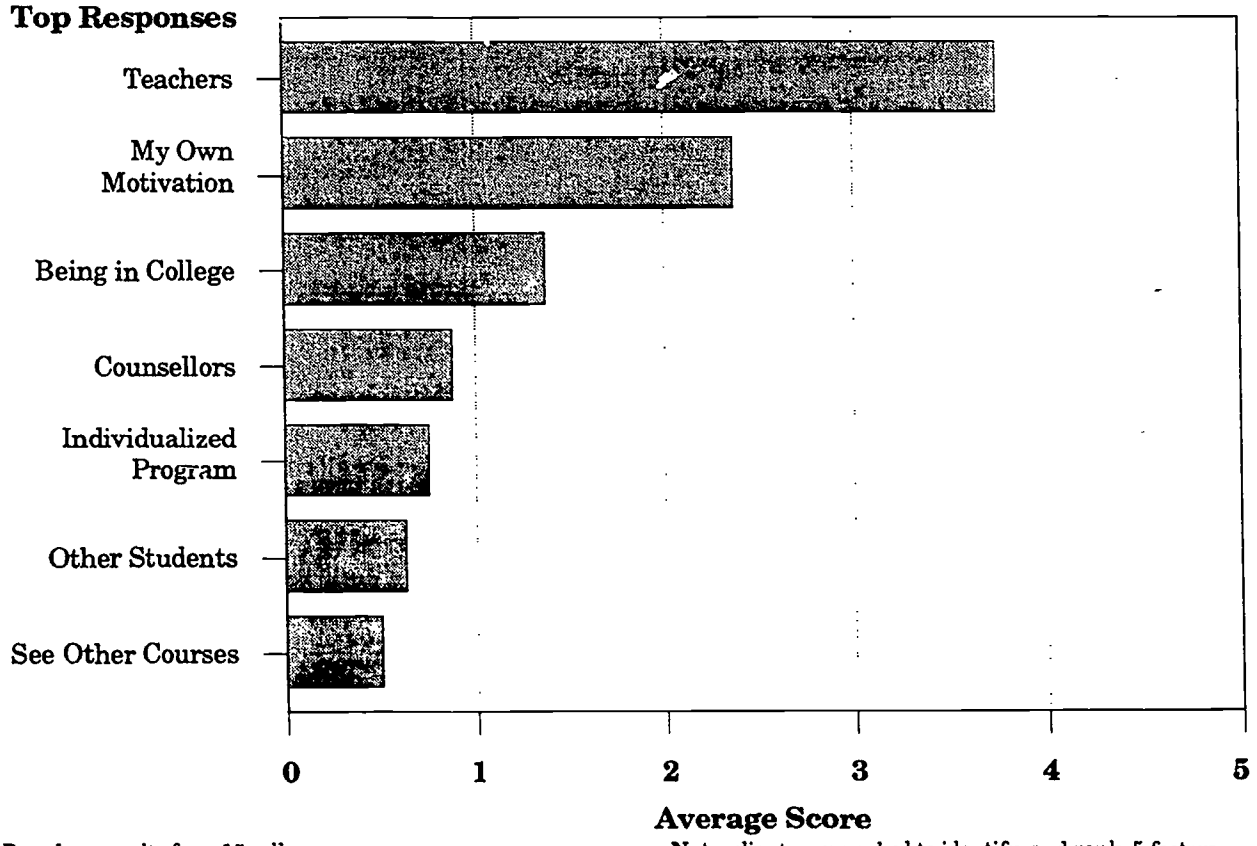
> The main reasons why I feel that this program worked so well for me are: it allowed me to be able to take some time off when needed, to care for my children when they became ill, and then start back up where I left off; it also encouraged me to do the school work because it was in a classroom and not on my own in my spare time; you could go through the material as quickly as

"Correspondence courses could have replaced the academic portion of my training but no correspondence course could have helped me build up the self-confidence and courage I needed to successfully attend college," wrote an OBS graduate who is now attending a post-secondary college program.

you were able to understand it, making it possible to advance at a faster rate than going back to high school; as well the teachers were all very helpful and explained things clearly.

Another student wrote, "The fact that this program is geared towards adults is one of the most important factors." M., a graduate of Niagara College OBS program, expressed similar feelings: "Prior to that time [OBS], I was on welfare and was told my only other alternative was to go back to school with the teenagers in high school for two years. I tried it that way first and met with disaster. I found I couldn't cope with the younger students' attitudes and biases." A woman who has enrolled in Niagara College's new FBO program in Welland after spending many years working in a factory and raising her family was thrilled to be part of a program directed towards adults: "It's a dream for me. Studying

Figure 1: Ontario Basic Skills Clients Were Asked: "What Makes OBS Work for You?"



Based on results from 15 colleges
Source: Andrea Leis, Conestoga College
ACAATO 92-12-13

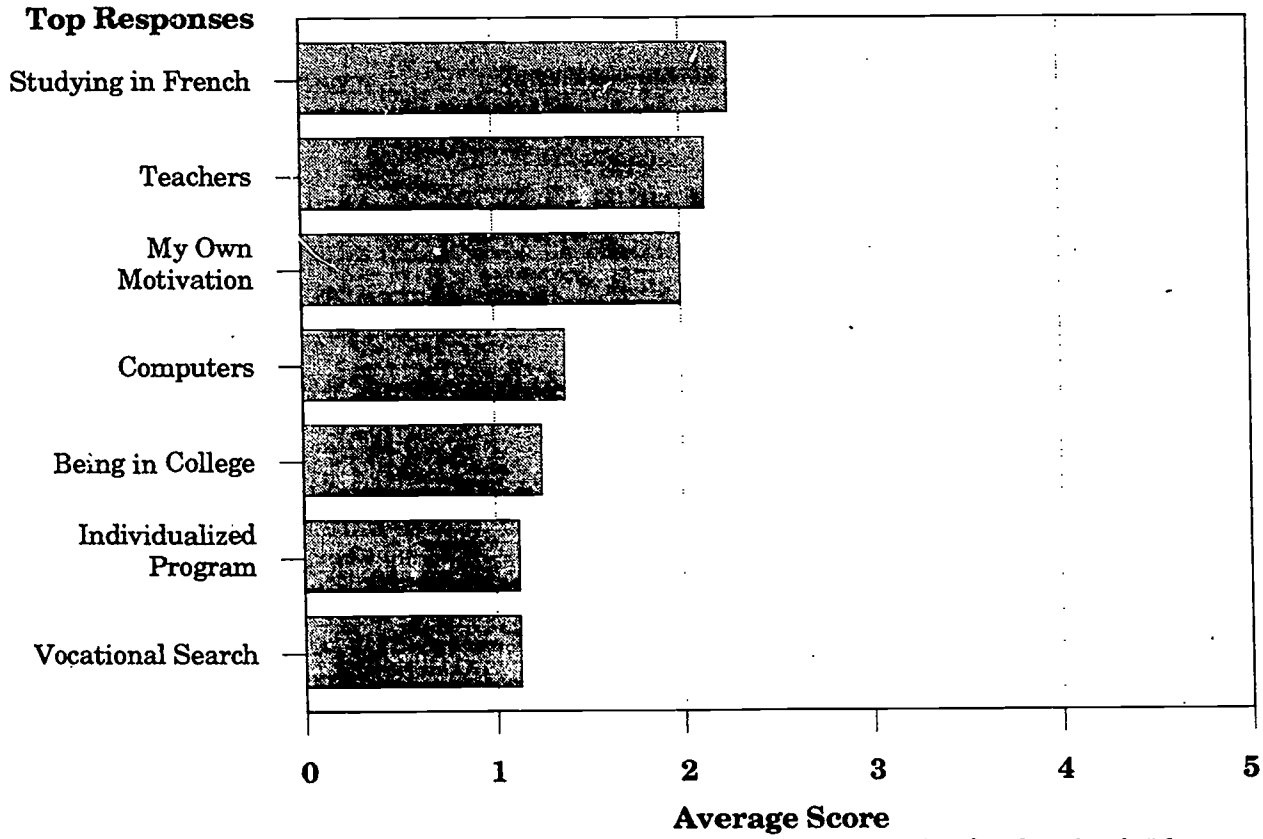
Note: clients were asked to identify, and rank, 5 factors from a list; results were weighted based on rankings: 5 for first place, 4 for second place, ... 1 for fifth place.

with young people isn't so comfortable. This is much more comfortable, being with adults. And it's in French, and it's in Welland, where I live."

"Correspondence courses could have replaced the academic portion of my training but no correspondence course could have helped me to build up the self-confidence and courage I needed to successfully attend college," wrote an OBS graduate who is now attending a postsecondary college program.

On the critical side, students voiced concern about the amount of time allowed for OBS. Many felt that the individualized program was essential but that they would have liked more time. Others were glad that the individualization allowed them to move as quickly as they could to enable them to enter a postsecondary

Figure 2: Formation de base de l'Ontario Clients Were Asked: "What Makes FBO Work for You?"



Based on results from 8 colleges
Source: Andrea Leis, Conestoga College
ACAATO 92-12-13

Note: clients were asked to identify, and rank, 5 factors from a list; results were weighted based on rankings: 5 for first place, 4 for second place, ... 1 for fifth place.

program. There was a concern that some students weren't really working hard and were taking up a valuable seat someone else might be able to use better. There was a real sense that time was a valuable commodity which should be taken seriously.

Graduates of OBS have also expressed a concern that those going on to postsecondary programs realize that postsecondary teachers may not be quite so sympathetic to outside events in a student's life and that there will be a greater emphasis on deadlines. OBS teachers are aware of this and many are adjusting their curriculum at the higher levels to help with this transition to postsecondary programs.

Where do students go after OBS and FBO?

At this point, follow-up on students is informal at most colleges. Most tracking is done on students who stay in the college system. Colleges submit exit data to the Ministry of Education although faculty are quick to say that the monthly exit forms they send in to the Ministry don't tell the whole story. Of the 18 colleges which responded to a set of written questions, 10 give OBS/FBO students a student number which remains with them if they enter postsecondary programs. Six colleges plan to begin this system for tracking students.

Michael Prentice, an English and mathematics professor at Sheridan College, wrote, "There have been many success stories. Some of these successes have been small, perhaps only significant to the individual, while others have been more dramatic, involving the granting of certificates or diplomas." He then wrote about M., a social assistance recipient "who was the product of a dysfunctional family. She wanted to help her own children with their school work. She was exceedingly proud when she was able to help them with their mathematics homework."

Though the OBS objectives are "to provide academic upgrading to improve their access to further skill training or employment," the current shortage of jobs has made further training more the reality for most students in OBS. Hugh Armstrong of Centennial College says, "Few students see employment as their next step."

J., a graduate of the Chapleau campus of Sault College, said "leaving here is like leaving a family." J. left Chapleau with her young son to begin a forestry program at Sir Sandford Fleming in

Lindsay. Other students agree that after entering, the hardest part is leaving. On the other hand, some of the students going on to postsecondary programs, have felt very prepared.

C., a graduate of Sir Sandford Fleming's OBS program in Peterborough, found it "easy to make the transfer to the R.N. program in September." A student at the St. Catharines campus of Niagara College wrote, "Yes, I would consider my experience successful because through the program, it showed me that I can do it, I can be successful at what I do." Another student wrote, "It teaches adults that there is never an end to learning, and that each of us can be a success."

One graduate of Cambrian's FBO program went on to study early childhood education at the same college. She is now coordinator of the Francophone day care centre at Cambrian.

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Bridging to postsecondary programs has not always been so successful. Sue Pletzer, a counsellor at Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) in North Bay, is very concerned about the communication between upgrading programs such as OBS and postsecondary or skills trades programs. Sue has met with OBS counsellors to discuss program requirements needed for learners to successfully make the next step. Sue says, "We have always had a good relationship with the college and the university and we want to maintain it and help make the bridge."

Three of the 18 colleges that responded to a written questionnaire said that they have formal arrangements with the local school board for helping students move from one program to another. Three other colleges have informal arrangements, three more are working on such arrangements and nine do not have articulation agreements.

Many of the programs hold graduation ceremonies. Some are separate from the college and others are integrated into the main college convocation. Students interviewed remember these events fondly. After participating in Cambrian College's Fourth Annual Mature Students' Recognition Ceremony, a 50-year-old Sudbury man said, "I shook the dean's hand. I never thought *I'd* do *that*!"

In July, OBS students at Canadore College in North Bay were busy planning their own graduation ceremony scheduled for August. In the process, they were learning a lot of organization and budgeting skills. At La Cité collégiale in Ottawa, students graduating from FBO and other non-postsecondary programs are recognized at the college's main graduation ceremony. As an indication of the value the college places on these students, they are given their diplomas before the postsecondary students.

Recommendation

There should be better tracking of students after they leave OBS or FBO in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and modify it where necessary. One way would be to use the same student identification number throughout the college system from OBS through post-secondary programs.

Faculty/Staff Response

Philosophy/Approach

OBS is learner-centred, holistic, and adult-oriented. There is a philosophy at work here which pervades the entire program. Guidelines are sufficiently flexible to allow programs to adapt to local needs and priorities.

Michael Prentice of Sheridan College wrote,

> The students have a varied background both in academic preparation and past work experience. However, they all bring with them the cumulative memory of past experiences that influences their perceptions of their abilities. As a result, an important part of what takes place in the classroom is the building of self-esteem and the fostering of the belief that they can succeed....At the college we are not just faculty and staff. Rather, we are more like mentors taking a personal interest in the students and offering advice and support. Upon completion of the course the student should have experienced not just academic achievement but also personal growth.

Lou Orr, professor of Level IV English and computers at Niagara College, says, "We take a holistic approach which is tied to student competence. Life skills are integrated into the course. Students resent when life skills are taught separately."

Donna Putman, Counsellor and OBS Coordinator at Niagara College, calls OBS "a transition place to try things out. If you miss a week, you don't fail. This is a period of trial and error....It may be necessary to work out other problems first."

The fact that faculty members list self-esteem, confidence, decision-making, and working together as a team as objectives is evidence of this philosophy in practice.

Recommendation

OBS and FBO programs should continue to follow methods of adult education, that is, to consider the needs of the whole adult and plan programs and services accordingly.

Admission

Admission to the OBS or FBO program may be either continuous or block—that is, as seats become available or at a regular time, or a combination of the two depending on the number of seats and funding available. Most programs are offered both full- and part-time and some even meet the needs of adults working shifts by being open evenings.

St. Clair College technician Nancy Kendrick attributes part of the success of their program to their 52-week continuous intake policy. "This enables students to focus on the prerequisites required for the September/January admissions into the postsecondary programs without delaying their application for the entire calendar year."

Many programs have waiting lists. This is undoubtedly partly related to the high rates of unemployment. Balancing individual needs and other factors is part of the role of intake counsellors.

Assessment

Assessment is usually the first step for a student. There is no one assessment tool and many colleges use more than one. The Canadian Adult Achievement Test (CAAT), the Woodcock-Johnson test, the Test of Reading Comprehension (TORC), the Gates-MacGinity, and the Test of Written Language (TOWL) are some of the standardized tests used. In-house tests for math placement are common.

At Algonquin College and La Cité collégiale in Ottawa, students who come in take an initial placement test. After that they proceed by modules, with a test at the end of each module. Students work at their own pace, and take each test when they are ready.

Informal interviews also play an important part in placing an OBS student. College special needs counsellors may offer testing for students suspected of having learning disabilities.

At the OBS program at Centennial College in Scarborough the teachers want to move more toward learning outcomes. That is, they are placing students by objectives whenever possible. A team effort is used to look at the total skills of the student for placement purposes. Teachers work with agencies such as Canada Employment Centre and Metro Toronto Social Services in making effective placements.

Donna Putman, counsellor and coordinator at Niagara College, tries not to test students and put them in modules. Instead, she says, "Our placement is competency-based. We tell what our objectives are and ask the student to help work with us....We quantify by objectives and student outcomes, not curriculum modules and time lines."

Individual training plans

Fanshawe College in Simcoe writes an initial plan and reviews it every four to six weeks with the student. The first review includes academic background, personal development (strengths, areas of focus for upgrading, and interests); goals (educational, vocational, and personal); and plans (action and target dates). The updates include progress toward the initial plan and the revised plan. The student and staff member sign and the plan is reviewed by the OBS manager.

Conestoga College has developed a Learning Contract/Progress Tracking Record which is also co-signed by the student and college coordinator as well as the sponsor, when appropriate. It relates specifically to the goal of the student and the requirements of postsecondary programs at Conestoga College. These articulation agreements are reviewed yearly with postsecondary staff.

Humber, Sheridan, Seneca, Centennial, Mohawk, Durham and George Brown colleges are cooperatively writing a plan which breaks math courses into units in order to write personalized plans of study which match requirements for postsecondary courses across all seven colleges.

Regular monitoring of student progress is done at all OBS and FBO programs. Students and teachers agree that this keeps students from "falling between the cracks."

Orientation

Orientation to OBS and FBO varies from a three-week period to just part of a day. Students who have participated in an orientation reported that it was helpful.

The three-week orientation at Cambrian College includes a tour of the college, self-assessment workshop, stress management, assertiveness training and keyboarding.Students at Cambrian claim that orientation was very good—in their words, they "developed bonds among each other."

"Our placement is competency-based. We tell what our objectives are and ask the student to help work with us....We quantify by objectives and student outcomes, not curriculum modules and time lines."

—Donna Putman

Chapleau Campus of Sault College distributes an OBS/FBO student handbook which includes a program outline sheet and activity schedule to form a personal training plan which is reviewed with a faculty member at the end of each month. Study skills, time management, testing procedures, month-end evaluation, student services, and a personal inventory are also part of the handbook. La Cité also distributes a handbook, which contains information on everything from courses offered to public transportation and how to manage stress.

At Durham College in Oshawa, counsellor Nancy Hempel gets students together one month after orientation to do a training plan *then*. Study skills and time management are worked into Loyalist College's one-day orientation. Funding has restricted the amount of orientation time some programs are able to offer students.

Counselling

Counsellors play a key role in the students' success. When counsellors are not available, teachers fill the need OBS and FBO students have to discuss their progress and plans. At many programs, teachers have received training as life-skills counsellors.

The one-to-one contact and ability to help the student make the transition back into school and then into higher education or employment is a critical role of the teacher/counsellor. As Niagara College teacher Lou Orr put it, "Success depends on looking at the individual student. Every student is a special needs student." Each program has its own way of providing counselling services.

At Centennial College, teachers are allocated counselling hours. The student services counsellor from the main building of Loyalist College comes once a week to the OBS program but is available at the main campus any time. At Algonquin College and La Cité collégiale, a teacher is assigned to each student as an academic counsellor. The student meets with the counsellor once a month to review the student's progress. The counsellor also helps students from different cultural backgrounds deal with adjustment problems.

At Durham College there are two counsellors at present. One is paid through Social Assistance Recipient funding, through the Ministry of Education, while the other is included in the base funding as a faculty unit. They help make connections, serve as student advocates and mediators, and do career and vocational counselling. Jeannette Barrett, Durham's Manager of OBS and Futures, says that for OBS students, "This is a stabilization period. It's their first attempt to go back to school. Students have many issues—housing, day care, marital. We need to be flexible." She adds, "We try to create a menu of opportunity."

The special needs office at the main campus is available to OBS and FBO students at all colleges, although for students at satellite campuses it is not always practical to use this service.

Curriculum

OBS and FBO programs offer basic upgrading, computer, technical orientation, life and employment preparation skills. Each college has its own way of providing these skills and there is a range in the focus of OBS programs from life skills to academic upgrading

within college programs. FBO programs tend to be more academically oriented than OBS. The current lack of available jobs has placed an emphasis on further training at all programs.

Sandra Hennessey, OBS Manager at Fanshawe College in London, believes that it is necessary to take a "life skills approach to learning." This approach supports peer facilitation and the idea that different ways of using knowledge need to be respected.

The Fast Track OBS program at the London campus of Fanshawe allows students who are assessed at mid-level III (or grade 9–10) to take a six-week refresher course in math, communications, science, and career selection. They go through as a group and when the six weeks are over, can enter fee-paying (BTSD or academic upgrading), OBS or a High School adult program. According to Fast Track teacher Carmel McGinnis, "Students are selected if they have some high school courses and know they want upgrading. The program helps them to identify their options. At the end of fast-tracking, they are not intimidated by college. They have opportunities to visit postsecondary programs or have the coordinator talk to them. 50% of the students who complete the six weeks go on to postsecondary programs. Others choose something out of school or another program. Fast track is more focused—everyone has a plan at the end of 6 weeks."

The current lack of available jobs has placed an emphasis on further training at all programs.

Kelly Sweeney, OBS Coordinator at the Sault campus of Sault College, notes that their program is increasingly becoming preparation for postsecondary programs as there is a 20% unemployment rate in that area. Though the program has been individualized and self-paced, this year Sweeney is instituting lecture style for half of the class time as preparation for postsecondary courses.

According to Ann Croll, Coordinator of OBS at Algonquin College in Ottawa, most Level I students surveyed last year said that they planned to go on to further education. Five years ago, many students left Level I and II for jobs. In keeping with this transition, Algonquin has modified its approach to OBS. Instead of maintaining the standard four-level approach to upgrading, some levels have been merged and the teaching style modified to match student goals.

Daily classes are offered in Level III science and in Level IV chemistry, biology, and physics. These classes are run more like postsecondary classes, with deadlines for assignments and a larger laboratory component. Students in Level III or IV communication and mathematics attend two-hour classes where they work on individualized modules. Level I and II groups are more integrated and work with the same teacher as much as possible.

All students have core academic courses of communication and mathematics and, depending on their level and goals, can access options such as computer skills, career planning, a mathematics lab, a communications lab, and a career assessment lab.

Croll was part of a team which prepared *Career Planning—A Thematic Unit for Integrated Curriculum* for the Ministry of Education. It consists of a basic, intermediate, and advanced level workbook which integrates reading, listening, writing, interpersonal relations, computation, problem solving, computer and hands-on skills into the overall theme of career planning. This program is used as a mini-course or part-time program at a number of OBS programs.

Conestoga College divides its OBS program into three components:

1. Basic literacy and numeracy;

2. Functional—academic upgrading (up to grade 12);

3. Training readiness—to help people make decisions about training and employment, organize their lives, and help them to gain confidence.

Of the 18 colleges which responded to a written questionnaire, 14 said that they didn't think that the 16-week training period was long enough, especially for those who enter in the lower levels. Three thought that the 16 weeks were sufficient, at least to complete one level.

College Role

Integration of OBS into the college

The OBS program used to be 'in the barn' but now it is integrated into the regular college building....Now the college recognizes the high retention rate of OBS students in postsecondary programs so students have established their own reputation at the college.
—Kelly Sweeney, OBS Coordinator, Sault campus, Sault College

Postsecondary faculty probably think of upgrading as the "poor cousin."
—Paul Wells, Director of Community Services, Georgian College

It was easier to have a group feeling and develop more confidence when the program was across the road at Bell Farm. Now it is easier for OBS students to get lost or feel second-class though it is good to have the opportunity to mix with other students.
—Ann Anderson, Special Support Officer, Georgian College

THESE QUOTES EXPRESS THE RANGE OF ATTITUDES that people working in OBS programs have toward their relationship with the rest of the college.

The establishment of Schools of Access at colleges has increased the profile of OBS programs. The purpose of these new departments is to give another chance to adults who have traditionally been left out or been unsuccessful in postsecondary programs. This has always been the mandate of OBS, yet some colleges are only now recognizing the importance of access programs.

Even the students have mixed responses to feeling part of the college. Although "being in college" ranks among the top five factors leading to success in the student's mind, having a "safe place" of their own has also been important. At one college, students regret that the services (library, recreation centre) of the main campus are not as available to them at their satellite campus.

When students reach levels III and IV at Lambton College, they move from the downtown location to the main campus and some feel lost. Students also comment on the faster pace and "different atmosphere" of the main campus.

Recommendation

The college system should continue to recognize OBS and FBO as vital programs. Regional OBS/FBO working groups should report to Heads of Access, a recently set up coordinating group within ACAATO, so these programs continue to be seen as integral parts of the college system.

Arrangements between OBS/FBO and postsecondary programs

OBS and FBO programs have made a wide variety of arrangements for entry into postsecondary programs. Some programs have no formal arrangements while others have finely tuned articulation agreements with preferred status for successful graduates.

Josh Lipszyc, coordinator of OBS and Access programs at Lambton College, says that attempts are made to match OBS programs with postsecondary courses but there are no official agreements.

Bob McIver, Chair of Preparatory Studies at Conestoga College, says,

> OBS is offered in close cooperation with other things going on at the college; it is not an entity in itself. We need to make fair opportunities for adults returning to school. Prerequisites for each Conestoga College postsecondary course have been developed. It used to be that 40% of OBS students went into further training after training readiness and 60% went into employment. Now 90% go on to further training, 10% into employment. People never really fit into a certain number of weeks or a program level.

"The beauty of the program is its flexibility." —Marie-Paule Forest

Jeannette Barrett at Durham College tries to give the message that "this is your college" to OBS students. College tours and postsecondary faculty are brought in to meet with OBS students. Students are allowed to audit postsecondary courses.

At Cambrian College, Francophone students are introduced to postsecondary courses while they are still in FBO. "The beauty of the program is its flexibility," says coordinator Marie-Paule Forest. "A student can be at level one in one subject, level four in another, and taking a postsecondary course in something else."

One student who tested at a very high level in science quickly completed the FBO science program and went on to postsecondary courses. She decided she wanted to be a dietitian and now works in the dietetics department at Sudbury's Laurentian Hospital.

At Canadore College in North Bay, students have the possibility of investigating trades and apprenticeships right in the same building. Norma-Jean Nielsen, Coordinator of Access and Skills Development, says that this allows students to make better choices: "There is an open door to all programs which are just downstairs—meat processing, daycare, framing, drywalling, construction, auto repair, bricklaying, baking, and hydraulics." In addition, OBS students can sign up for 20-week preparatory programs such as pre-health, business, and technology as an alternative to Level IV. Nielsen also notes that fewer and fewer students are going straight to employment: "Some may get jobs but still continue in school part-time once they've identified a need for upgrading."

"There is an open door to all programs which are just downstairs—meat processing, daycare, framing, drywalling, construction, auto repair, bricklaying, baking, and hydraulics."

—Norma-Jean Nielsen

There is a question of fairness regarding reserving seats in postsecondary programs for OBS graduates. Some argue that successful OBS students are their own endorsement; others say that all prospective students should have the same chance at being accepted. Of the 18 colleges which responded to a written questionnaire, three actually reserve postsecondary seats for successful OBS or FBO graduates, two offer "preferential treatment," and 13 do not reserve seats for OBS or FBO graduates.

At Niagara College, some OBS students are offered free tuition to a postsecondary course while enrolled in OBS if they intend to go on to enroll in that program the next year. Level IV courses are articulated with postsecondary courses. The coordinator is hoping to work out an exemption for a postsecondary English course by June 1993 and one for math soon after. Counsellor and coordinator Donna Putman says that students worked hard to get respect from postsecondary programs: "A portfolio, not just a transcript, is sent over for OBS graduates."

Programs to Meet Special Needs

OBS AND FBO AIM TO MEET THE NEEDS of Ontario adults, including women, Native Peoples, visible minorities, older workers, people with disabilities, and social assistance recipients who have less than Grade 12. Because it is an individualized learner-centred program, modifications are regularly made to meet the needs of every student. Still, there are some special programs which have developed to meet needs of particular groups.

London-based Fanshawe College has developed a variety of other programs for special groups:

1. Technical orientation—a part-time course which offers women an opportunity to investigate trades which were traditionally closed to them.

2. "New Opportunities for Women"—life skills and academic upgrading for sole-support mothers.

3. Second-stage housing—a life-skills program for women living in shelters from abusive home situations.

4. Life skills group facilitator training—a self-help program designed to share and further develop facilitation skills and personal strengths as well as develop a support network for women who have been through community-based life skills programs to provide on-going support in their community roles.

5. Zhiitaam (Ojibway for 'preparing')—a program for Native People offering courses in communication, math, science, computer literacy, and Native studies to prepare them for entrance to the University and College Entrance program.

6. A life skills training program for hearing handicapped students.

Conestoga College offers a Focus Program which is designed "to prepare individuals on social assistance to examine and plan job/career opportunities by assisting them to apply the problem-solving skills necessary to gain realistic perspectives of themselves, to set goals, and to make appropriate decisions." (taken from course outline)

Helen Watt, literacy teacher at Conestoga's Cambridge campus, works with students with disabilities. She has two students who are deaf and four students who use wheelchairs. She has found and created materials and equipment to help meet their unique needs.

Cambrian College's FBO program works to meet the needs of students with disabilities as those needs arise. On one occasion four students who were deaf entered the program at the same time. One of them, Roger Saint-Louis, was able to hear a little better than the others and helped by translating into signed French for them. Saint-Louis went on to study at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., and now teaches signed French at Cambrian.

Algonquin College is working with their special needs department to integrate students with special needs into the OBS program and have accommodated several students who are deaf, students in wheelchairs, and one student who is blind.

Sir Sandford Fleming College in Peterborough has attracted a number of students who are deaf. They have connected with Gallaudet University for the latest in computer technology and have made arrangements with their special needs office to hire a tutor who can sign.

Canadore College has recognized the preferred group learning style of some Native people and has made classroom modifications. Fanshawe College has made special arrangements with a Native program to ease the transition to OBS programs. Algonquin College OBS materials are being used at a nearby reserve. Jay Moore, staff at Mohawk College's Job Readiness Program (non-OBS), recommends that OBS programs be set up on reserves and in nearby urban settings for off-reserve Native Peoples, and that Native counsellors be employed for OBS programs.

Priscilla George, Native Program Coordinator at the Literacy Branch of the Ministry of Education, acknowledged the importance of Native curriculum, Native teaching styles, and support systems such as day care, transportation, and counselling for program success.

Table I (page 7) shows the special needs populations served by OBS and FBO programs.

Recommendation

There should be more communication among OBS and FBO programs, especially about innovative models that meet the needs of marginalized students.

Recommendation

There should be more program modifications to meet the needs of Native Peoples.

Collaborative Efforts and Partnerships

WORKING WITH ADULTS WHO HAVE MULTIPLE NEEDS has called on the resourcefulness of OBS and FBO programs. Collaborative efforts with community programs have maximized existing resources, reduced duplication, and raised both the community's and the learner's awareness of what opportunities exist.

Sharing resources has created unique programs such as upgrading programs at public housing units in Metro Toronto (Centennial and George Brown), London (Fanshawe), and Sudbury (Cambrian).

Cambrian College's OBS program offers on-site instruction at two housing authorities. Mathematics, life skills, science, and communication courses are offered along with various skill options. According to Mary Jonik, coordinator of the Outreach program at Rumball Terrace, the program has been very successful:

> Many of the tenants felt intimidated by the thought of attending an academic institution. By making education accessible through the Ontario Basic Skills Outreach program, Cambrian is helping to remove some of the barriers people often face when pursuing an education at the postsecondary level. The program is on-site and provides the necessary flexibility for residents to go to school and to fulfill their personal responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed.

These programs have raised the confidence and awareness of

tenants so that they can become more effective in determining the direction of their own lives.

Niagara College's FBO program, which began operation in the fall of 1992, is a partnership between the college and the Niagara school board and is located at École secondaire Confédération in Welland. The college has taken responsibility for the content of the program and has hired the teachers; the school board looks after the physical plant, providing a classroom and office formerly used by the student council in the secondary school. The board also helps with recruitment and provides additional instruction to students on unemployment insurance for whom the FBO program's 16 hours a week are not enough to meet the UI minimum requirement of 25 hours per week instruction. Both Anita Bonelli, director of FBO, and Alcide Gour, the school board's superintendent of French-language services, are very satisfied with the way the collaboration has worked out.

Collaborative efforts with community programs have maximized existing resources, reduced duplication, and raised both the community's and the learner's awareness of what opportunities exist.

The FBO program in Hamilton is also a college–school board partnership. In this case, École secondaire Georges P. Vanier, where classes are held, delivers the academic component of the program while Mohawk College delivers the life-skills program. Unlike most OBS and FBO programs, this program offers a Grade 12 diploma rather than an equivalency.

Literacy is perhaps the area where the most creative partnerships have evolved. Since the announcement of the Ontario Government Plan for Adult Literacy in 1986, literacy programs have multiplied in Ontario. Community-based programs, boards of education, and colleges offer literacy instruction to growing numbers of adults. Cross-referrals are frequent depending on the program and scheduling needs of the learner. Literacy networks across the province meet to discuss local needs and resources. College representatives serve on these networks and in many cases have initiated them. Special projects have developed from these networks, such as the Recognition for Learning Pilot Project in Perth and Huron counties.

Cambrian College acquired Social Services Employment Program (SSEP) grants through joint partnerships with the John

Howard Society and the Ministry of Community and Social Services. These grants cover the salaries of outreach coordinators.

Literacy is perhaps the area where the most creative partnerships have evolved.

In Middlesex County, the Board of Education and Fanshawe's OBS program cost-share OBS Levels I and II. Classes are held at the Strathroy Public Library on a flexible, continuous-intake schedule to accommodate workers on swing shifts. Teachers are hired by the Middlesex Board of Education and their salaries and overhead costs are shared by Fanshawe.

George Brown College in Toronto offers OBS Level I at five community-based programs. Funding is based on monthly reports of student-teacher contact hours and is used by most of the programs to help with paying staff salaries.

Durham College and the Durham Board of Education have worked out arrangements for OBS students to be able to write a Board exam to receive a Grade 12 diploma.

To reach rural learners, Conestoga College has set up off-campus OBS literacy programs at the Wingham United Church, Goderich Royal Canadian Legion Hall, the Listowel Public Library, and the Huron Employment Liaison Program office in Clinton.

OBS

EVIDENCE OF THE NEED FOR OBS in the community is indicated by the number of referrals from Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Canada Employment Centres, Workers' Compensation Board offices, Employment Resource Centres, school boards, and the John Howard Society, among other agencies to all OBS programs.

D.A. MacDonald, Counselling Coordinator at the Belleville Canada Employment and Immigration Centre, says, "Ontario Basic Skills is an essential service we haven't been able to provide... we have moved to higher level training and have lost our own low level training. OBS fills a gap."

Pat Kennedy teaches OBS at an off-campus location of Algonquin College in Ottawa's West End Boys and Girls Club, which is adjacent to Foster Farm Housing Project of the Ottawa Housing Authority. For the students, the location is critical. Being close to home minimizes transportation difficulties and reduces the problem of finding suitable child care. Being in a familiar location lessens the scariness of going back to school. According to Kennedy, "Just the hassle of registering at the main campus would be a nightmare for some students—public transportation, having to bring the kids downtown."

Kennedy helps make the bridge for students by getting to know the community resources. Kennedy, students, and the community all benefit from these linkages. There are good contacts with nearby legal aid, medical and other community services. The Pinecrest Queensway Community Services Board provides service workers who are able to help with counselling needs. Kennedy's college connection enables him to piece together other funding sources to allow students to reach their academic goals once their time in OBS has run out. Last year, three students went on to postsecondary programs at Algonquin.

Algonquin College also offers Levels I to IV at Smiths Falls. According to the coordinator, Marian Smith, travelling into Ottawa would be impossible for most of their students. As it is, many are commuting an hour each day from rural areas to attend the program.

Felice Markowitz, Literacy and Social Assistance Recipient (SAR) Coordinator at George Brown College's off-campus location at a Metro

Toronto Housing Authority apartment building on Sherbourne Street, has come up with a unique solution to reduce the tension of the move to on-campus locations. She is working on an agreement with Frontier College to provide tutors who will go with OBS students to provide academic and emotional support in their new settings.

The downtown Sarnia location of Lambton College's Riverside campus is also convenient for students. It is easily accessible by public transportation and near other services such as the Health Unit and the Canada Employment Centre, as well as a shopping mall. The office building in which it is located lends a very adult atmosphere.

"Ontario Basic Skills is an essential service we haven't been able to provide."
—D.A. MacDonald, Canada Employment

Georgian College does not have a university in its catchment area. In Midland, Parry Sound, and Penetanguishene, OBS programs share facilities with other agencies. The college gives an important presence in these towns. According to Paul Wells, Director of Community Services at Georgian College, there was a lot of pride in Orangeville when a college building opened there in August 1992.

Rachel Mahrer, employment counsellor for Waterloo Region's Employment Resource Centre (run by the Ministry of Community and Social Services), says,

> We really use the whole OBS program. We recognize the cumulative experience of the college. Deb Cox [FOCUS teacher in Cambridge] really knows our clients' barriers. The length of the program [12 weeks] and the 'non-welfare' setting is very good. The women feel safe there. If OBS were ever cancelled, we'd have a huge gaping hole.

Rick Souliere, supervisor of opportunity planning at North Bay Social Services, is very aware of the employment situation and the need for upgrading:

> What chance does a person who can barely read and write have when college graduates can't find work? We think OBS is a pretty neat thing and should continue. It creates an environment for people to get out of their own cubicle and see what options are available to them.

Souliere sees OBS offering more than basic upgrading. Canadore College's individualized approach, which includes life

skills, is very important. So is the fact that it is located within a college. "A student can look at other skills training offered at the college without having to bounce around a lot of different agencies," Souliere added.

As chair of Canadore College's Access Programs advisory board, Souliere is concerned about access issues. He finds the limit on the number of seats available very restrictive. He thinks it is necessary to highlight the importance of improved linkages between upgrading and skills training programs.

Sue Pletzer, Vocational Rehabilitation Services counsellor in North Bay, agrees with Souliere's concerns about access. She often sponsors clients to attend OBS programs but some of her clients have recently felt unprepared for their postsecondary programs. Pletzer said that the college has been very cooperative and is aware of the problem; they are planning a joint meeting to address the issue.

The cumulative experience and resources for adults which community colleges have amassed are invaluable to the community at large.

Peter Fawcett, principal of Continuing Education for the Durham County Board of Education, says that "there is a lot of need out there—no need to compete for students. We have our approach and the college has theirs. People can choose."

Kelly Limin, Employment Counsellor at Belleville's Quinte Hearing Handicapped Community Services Association, commented on one particular referral she made to Loyalist College's OBS program:

> T. is hearing impaired and was labelled developmentally delayed. She began Level I in September 1991 to work on reading, writing, spelling and math. She'd had life skills at a school for the deaf but I knew of no other non-segregated place in Belleville where T. could get academic upgrading. T. really likes the college setting, finds teachers really good, and has made quite a few friends. An interpreter from the Association usually goes to school with her but when T. goes alone, she can write to communicate with others. T. likes being able to go to a program where she isn't labelled.

In addition to serving learners' needs directly, faculty and administration of OBS programs frequently serve on the boards of literacy networks, labour adjustment initiatives, employment equity, jobsOntario and community training agencies as well.

Catherine Giles, Chair of Lambton College's Access Programs, serves on the Sarnia Community Advisory Board along with representatives from the Board of Education, Labour Council, Multicultural Centre, Canada Employment Centre, social service agencies, and local employers. They talk about improving programs and program promotion.

The cumulative experience and resources for adults which community colleges have amassed are invaluable to the community at large.

FBO

FBO PROGRAMS ARE DIFFERENT in the way they relate to their communities. Statistics collected by sociologist Roger Bernard in *Le Choc des nombres* show that French communities in Ontario are small, scattered, and insecure with respect to language and culture. Therefore, providing French-language educational services has significant cultural implications.

Under the French Language Services Act, which went into effect in 1989, colleges providing OBS programs in designated areas of the province have to offer services in French. Colleges in areas with large Francophone populations, such as Algonquin in Ottawa and Cambrian in Sudbury, were already offering FBO programs. Since 1989, new programs have been started in smaller Francophone communities such as Penetanguishene (Georgian College), Welland (Niagara College), and Hamilton (Mohawk College).

Because no two Ontario Francophone communities are alike, neither are any two FBO programs. In Ottawa, Élise Beauregard began providing a French-language basic skills program at Algonquin College in 1972, which became Algonquin's FBO program when FBO was set up.

In 1990 Algonquin's French-language services were transferred to Ottawa's newly established La Cité collégiale, Ontario's 23rd college and its first wholly French-language one. After a year at La Cité, the program enrolment had reached 100 students. "Our program has flourished," Beauregard says. In addition to the program at the main campus, La Cité runs satellite programs in Cornwall and Hawkesbury.

George Brown College's FBO program began in 1990. In the fall

of 1992, it was moved from a two-room facility at the St. James campus to a single room at the main Casa Loma campus. Although the OBS program down the hall is under the same administrative umbrella, the two programs function as separate units. George Brown offers no postsecondary French-language programs. Some FBO graduates go to York University's bilingual Glendon College or to La Cité in Ottawa, but most students who go on to postsecondary work do so in English.

In both Ottawa and Toronto, a significant portion of the Francophone community is made up of immigrants from other French-speaking countries, especially in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Caribbean, and they form a large part of FBO's clientele. At La Cité, multicultural relations are a continuing concern of the staff; at George Brown, one of the two teachers (for some 50 students), Mikael Missakabo, is himself a Francophone immigrant.

With between 160 and 180 students, the FBO program at Cambrian College in Sudbury is the largest in the province. While FBO is located in the same building as OBS and the two programs refer students to each other, they are physically separate (FBO is on the top floor and OBS is in the basement) and have separate identities. Adult students organize their own French cultural activities through the Regroupement des étudiants francophones du Collège Cambrian (Organization of Francophone Students at Cambrian College). These include a party for the Fête de Sainte-Catherine on November 25 as well as Hallowe'en, Christmas and Easter. In Sudbury, opportunities to live and work in French are relatively plentiful. Both Cambrian College and Laurentian University offer postsecondary education in French. In addition, the city has a French newspaper and many French-owned businesses where people can work in French.

The FBO program in Welland was established as a partnership between Niagara College and the school board in 1992. Welland's French-language secondary school, École secondaire Confédération, was one of the first in Ontario and has existed since the late 1960s. It was chosen as the most appropriate site. The school reflects the vigour of Welland's Francophone population, which supports numerous associations as well as the public French-language school board. Although there was some concern that the secondary school was not a sufficiently adult environment for FBO, situating the program in a Francophone atmosphere was regarded

as the overriding factor.

Penetanguishene's FBO program faces a more complex set of considerations, reflecting a Francophone community with a difficult history. For many years cultural and social pressures in the region discouraged people from speaking French and maintaining their French identity. It took a bitter struggle to establish Penetang's French-language secondary school in the 1970s. "Everything associated with French is a bit painful," says FBO coordinator France Picard.

As a result, reestablishment of a French identity in Penetang cannot come easily. In the area of adult education, the establishment of the literacy agency Alpha-Huronie was the first stage in this process of *refrancisation*. Picard regards FBO, established in 1991, as the second stage. "Alpha-Huronie created a demand for our program," she says. "I hope we will create a demand for postsecondary education."

With the bitter feelings surrounding the establishment of the secondary school still a vivid memory, it was feared that many potential FBO learners would not come if the program were located there. Instead, it occupies a suite of offices on the second floor of a shopping mall. No French-language postsecondary education is available in the region; Picard would like to see Penetang linked to a distance education program.

Because of the small size of Francophone communities outside the north and east and the need to consolidate resources, collaboration among colleges, school boards and community agencies is an especially appropriate model for FBO programs.

Because of the small size of Francophone communities outside the north and east and the need to consolidate resources, collaboration among colleges, school boards and community agencies is an especially appropriate model for FBO programs. A college–school board partnership exists in Hamilton as well as Welland, and France Picard has begun discussions with Alpha-Huronie and the school board in an effort to structure the Penetang program as a three-way partnership.

At a number of campuses where numbers do not warrant the establishment of a separate French-language program, combined

OBS/FBO programs are offered. FBO students use French-language materials and are helped by a bilingual instructor. While these programs offer an opportunity to study in French, English is generally the principal language of communication and the Francophone atmosphere that is valued at separate FBO programs is not there.

"The program works because it's based on the labour market."

—Martine Giguère

FBO programs try to take labour market needs into account in planning curriculum. "The program works because it's based on the labour market," says Martine Giguère, FBO coordinator at George Brown. Her program offers biology and physics as its science component because those are the sciences most in demand among employers. George Brown FBO also places heavy emphasis on computer instruction (there are 14 terminals in the crowded classroom), and "computers" ranked third (after "opportunity to study in French" and "teachers") in students' responses to the question "What makes FBO work for you?"

One area where FBO programs have difficulty meeting labour market needs, however, is language. Students and staff consistently identify the lack of an English component in the FBO program as a problem. Most employment opportunities for Francophones in Ontario, even in larger centres, are in bilingual positions, and teaching English as a second language (ESL) is outside FBO's mandate. Programs generally make efforts to find appropriate ESL programs elsewhere for students who need English instruction. In Penetang, this is done through the Independent Learning Centre; George Brown refers students to a variety of Toronto ESL programs. One full-time student is in class at George Brown until 3 p.m. and then attends English classes at Ontario Welcome House before going home to her family.

Another issue is access to postsecondary education. One student who graduated from FBO at George Brown wanted to go on to a postsecondary electronics course in English at the same college, only to find that one of the requirements was an English test, which he was unable to pass. However, at La Cité and Cambrian, students have a wide variety of opportunities to continue their education in French.

Recommendation

To remain sensitive to community needs, colleges and program funders should identify groups and individuals not being served and develop strategies to close these gaps.

RECENTLY THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT has announced major initiatives which affect OBS/FBO. JobsOntario and OTAB both have basic skills training as part of their mandate. OBS and FBO have been identified as part of the delivery of basic skills under these initiatives. Some OBS and FBO programs could also serve as models of community collaboration in the design and delivery of basic skills training under these initiatives.

JobsOntario/boulotOntario

JobsOntario Training Fund/boulotOntario Formation was announced by the Government of Ontario in May 1992 as an "innovative employment and training program." It consists of a training credit for employers, pre-employment training, an increase in the subsidized child care system and other employment supports, links to economic renewal, and a network of brokers to deliver the program in all communities across Ontario. The government turned to colleges and specifically, OBS programs to implement some of their programs. OBS and FBO provide a model for adult upgrading which emphasizes a high degree of collaboration among providers. Colleges are well placed to coordinate community services and the needs of adult learners.

One example of this cooperation is the jobsOntario Pre-Employment Training Program Model in Thunder Bay.

The jobsOntario Training Fund offered a 12-week core program and an optional five-week extension program in partnership with Confederation College and the Lakehead School Board. The academic core courses were offered by both the college and the Board of Education (except for science which was offered only by the college). Learners were free to choose which school they wanted to attend and were free to move between them. The curricula for the workshops (career planning, introduction to computers, intermediate computer skills, job search skills, assertiveness training, and personal life management) were approved by both program coordinators; faculty assignments were co-determined and the costs were shared.

Carol Bernhardson, college coordinator, said that the cooperation worked well but that the 17-week preparation time for jobs

was unrealistic because of the learner group enrolled. She states, "The client group enrolled were not able to attain the skills necessary for the jobs available in the time allowed." Some learners were able to continue their training with other jobsOntario programs or at the college either in OBS or with the assistance of special bursaries after the 17 weeks.

Both programs received notification of the funding at the end of May and the program began in the middle of June. This short start-up time made it difficult to put teachers in place and didn't allow enough time for careful interviewing of learners. The short preparation time didn't allow adequate day care arrangements to be made either, although funds were allocated for this purpose. Lou Pero, secondary school liaison for the Lakehead School Board, also felt that summer was not a great time for this kind of program in terms of both school board holidays and the availability of learners.

Bernhardson and Pero both felt that the cooperation between the Board of Education and Confederation worked well.

In the spring of 1992, Algonquin College was selected to pilot the jobsOntario pre-employment phase in the Ottawa-Carleton area. Fifty seats were allocated by the province and Algonquin ran three sessions, each twenty weeks long, including six weeks of work placement. Many of the components of the program were adapted from the OBS curricula for life skills, computer skills, communication, mathematics and career assessment. According to the coordinator, Joan Seeley, the programs were very successful with 2/3 of the participants completing the program. This success was achieved despite the one month start-up time, because the college already had OBS materials and teachers and could respond quickly.

Marian Sinn, Outreach Coordinator at Algonquin College's Smiths Falls campus, is involved with the Labour Adjustment Initiative as well. She finds that this wearing of many hats is helpful. Sinn says, "If jobsOntario remains as employment preparation, there is no conflict since OBS is primarily preparing people for further training."

A Sheridan College teacher's comment supports this: "JobsOntario has been using our curriculum—I have not viewed jobsOntario as a competitor." At Cambrian College, FBO and boulotOntario occupy adjoining offices and cooperate closely.

OBS and Ontario Training and Adjustment Board Project (OTAB)

THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO ANNOUNCED its intention to create OTAB in November 1991 in the consultation document, *Skills to Meet the Challenge: A Training Partnership for Ontario.* OTAB was planned to be an independent self-governing agency made up of key labour market partners and to have financial and administrative responsibility over Ontario's publicly funded training and labour force development programs, including OBS and FBO.

The Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (ACAATO) responded in their own document, *The Challenge: A Renewed Training & Adjustment System for Ontario.* It was developed by a task force representing college trainers and administrators across the province. It identifies areas of support, recommendations, and relevant issues.

Briefly, the ACAATO report supports "the reform and revitalization of Ontario's training system" along with coordination of training programs. It also supports "a Council structure within OTAB which will streamline training and adjustment programs and services." It supports workplace and sectoral training, a renewed apprenticeship system and an increased emphasis on foundation skills.

It recommends:

1. A client/learner–centred approach to training and adjustment;
2. Two learning streams which will be based on the types of service required by the learner: access programs and services, and skills training and development; and that OTAB develop an articulation mechanism between learning streams.
3. Foundation skills, assessment standards, and a coordinated approach to vocational counselling available to all learners;
4. Portability of skills through province-wide certification of training outcomes;
5. A quality-driven, stable training system by giving Local

At Cambrian College, FBO and boulotOntario occupy adjoining offices and cooperate closely.

Boards the autonomy to assess human resource development needs, set priorities, and monitor and evaluate training outcomes, within parameters established at the provincial and federal levels;

6. An equitable and representative OTAB governing body.

The response to the OTAB proposal from individual colleges is mixed. Not only are OBS and FBO program staff concerned about how they will actually fit in under OTAB, they are also concerned about what shape OTAB will take. Some colleges are optimistic about OBS fitting under OTAB:

Norma-Jean Nielsen of Canadore College says,

> I have no problems with OBS moving under OTAB. I think it will fit nicely. I look forward to it. The community should be involved. Training needs must meet the market. Funding should go where training is needed.

Élise Beauregard of La Cité collégiale sees OTAB as being more representative of the community than existing training agencies and regards this as a positive development.

Kelly Sweeney of Sault College says this about OBS fitting in under OTAB:

> We're in a good position. We offer as fine an access program as there is....OBS could stand some improvement...but we can customize programs to meet client needs. We have skills, resources, and a history of providing adult education.

Lynne Wallace, OBS Coordinator at Cambrian College, says,

> OBS can fit into OTAB and jobsOntario without having to change much... I have no problem with OTAB as long as it recognizes OBS for what it is. I am worried about who might be the community representatives on LTAB [Local Training and Adjustment Board]. OBS treads a delicate balance between social justice and education. The needs of adult students must be recognized. What if professional educators are not heard?

Concerns about adult learners' needs cross all colleges. There is a fear that other institutions which may not have the colleges' experience with adult learners and knowledge of community re-

"OBS is the most successful initiative in terms of client success and access that we have been privileged to be part of and we must strive to ensure that it continues."

—Claire Kaukinen

sources might offer cheaper training options.

For FBO programs, there is the additional concern of ensuring adequate Francophone representation on OTAB and the LTABs. While Élise Beauregard of La Cité is optimistic that such representation will be provided, France Picard of Georgian College's FBO program in Penetanguishene is less sure: she fears that a body dominated by Anglophones will fail to appreciate the need for French-language programs.

Paul Wells of Georgian College says that it will take a while before OTAB will look at individual programs. The question he asks is, "How can we make program delivery 'seamless' from secondary education to multi-career life span?" He sees the "16-week, narrowly focused program as it exists now" as "a violation of continuous learning principles."

Helen Watt, literacy teacher at Conestoga College, wrote, "I have a concern about developing skills for work. The skills we develop include social skills. Many of our students want to feel comfortable in their environments—at home, work, and with their friends."

Some people are opposed to putting OBS under a training umbrella on the grounds that if OBS were viewed only as a training program, counselling could be eliminated and the quality of the program would suffer.

Claire Kaukinen, Chair of Communication Arts at Confederation College, summed up the concerns about OTAB:

> The real strength of OBS has been the consistency of funding that has helped colleges to build strong curricula, staff and infrastructure. The real danger of OTAB is that the program may be "up for grabs" every year to the lowest bidder and people with a full-time career commitment to the adults and the education and access of the adults to basic education will not exist. A private trainer can hire non-tenured, part-time staff on a contract basis and recycle them if they become expensive.... OBS is the most successful initiative in terms of client success and access that we have been privileged to be part of and we must strive to ensure that it continues.

Recommendation

Funding should be on a multi-year basis to ensure effective development and delivery of OBS and FBO programs.

THE COST OF ANY PROGRAM HAS TO BE MEASURED against what it would cost if that service were not provided. An OBS graduate from Niagara College wrote,

> Today I am one of the top students in the nursing program [1st year] at Niagara College. I *know* I owe it all to the teachers and programs made available to me through the OBS program. If not for the encouragement I received in the program, I would still be on welfare, and would probably continue to stay on it for the rest of my life.

The range of services including special needs, personal, academic, and employment counsellors; expertise in teaching adults; and opportunities for further training at colleges has enabled OBS and FBO students to progress toward further training or employment without unnecessary disruption or discontinuity. The flexibility of the program allows it to be truly learner-centred and responsive to the community. Partnerships with other programs have created opportunities for adults which could not have existed in isolation.

Recommendations

Based on the record of the OBS and FBO programs, the following recommendations can be made:

1. There should be better tracking of students after they leave OBS or FBO in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and modify it where necessary. One way would be to use the same student identification number throughout the college system from OBS through postsecondary programs.

2. OBS and FBO programs should continue to follow methods of adult education, that is, to consider the needs of the whole adult and plan programs and services accordingly.

3. The college system should continue to recognize OBS and FBO as vital programs. Regional OBS/FBO working groups should report to Heads of Access, a recently set up coordinating group within ACAATO, so these programs continue to be seen as integral parts of the college system.

4. There should be more communication among OBS and FBO programs, especially about innovative models that meet the needs of marginalized students.

5. There should be more program modifications to meet the needs of Native Peoples.

6. To remain sensitive to community needs, colleges and program funders should identify groups and individuals not being served and develop strategies to close these gaps.

7. Funding should be on a multi-year basis to ensure effective development and delivery of OBS and FBO programs.

Appendix

Interview Questions for OBS participants

Name_____

Program_____

Dates of participation_____Completed or left?_____

Date and location of interview_____

1. Describe the OBS program you participated in.
2. Would you consider your experience successful? If so, why?
3. What made it work for you?
4. What have you done or been doing since you left the program?
5. What suggestions do you have for OBS programs in the future?

Community Questionnaire

Name_____Position_____ _____

Institution_____

Date of interview_____

1. How are you involved with the OBS program?
2. How did this partnership develop?
3. How would you rate its success?
   Why?
4. How do you think the program affects the community?
5. Have other services or programs developed around the program?
6. What suggestions do you have in terms of the future of the OBS program in light of new training delivery systems?

Interview Guide for OBS Staff

Name and position_____

Location of program_____Date of interview_____

1. Describe your program(s).

2. Tell me about some of your "success stories."
   Do you have any news clippings, photos, newsletters, or other "realia" to illustrate?

3. What is it about the program that helps students to progress toward further training or employment without unnecessary breaks?

4. Can you give any other examples of parts of the program which improve the quality of OBS/FBO programming but don't necessarily show up in the monthly statistical reports (e.g. counselling)?

5. What kind of working partnerships and collaborative efforts are there between OBS/FBO and other community, business, labour, or education programs?

6. Do you have any off-campus locations?
   How have they affected the community? What kind of associated services and programs have developed around them?

7. How aware is the community of this program? How do they (students, employers) know about it?

8. How have you met the needs of any traditionally marginalized (native, disabilities, SARs) groups?

9. Do you have any ideas how this information can be shared within the college system?

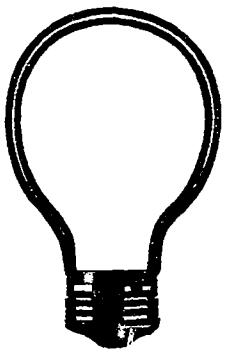
10. How can these programs continue to meet the needs of adults in the face of new delivery systems such as OTAB or Jobs Ontario Training Fund?

11. Are you interested in seeing the draft report?

Student Questionnaires

OBS

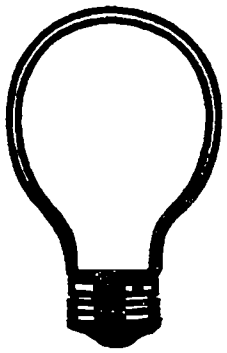
What makes OBS work for you?
Please rank the five most helpful factors, using #1 as the most helpful for you.



_____teachers
_____counsellors
_____vocational search
_____other students
_____individualized program
_____initial placement tests
_____workshops (self-esteem, stress, resume writing, etc.)
_____travel and child care subsidy
_____opportunity to investigate other courses and trades
_____being in college
_____my own motivation
_____office staff

FBO

Pourquoi le programme FBO marche pour moi
Marquer les cinq facteurs les plus importants à votre avis. Mettre un numéro '1' pour le facteur le plus important, un '2' pour le deuxième, etc.



_____les professeur-e-s
_____le counselling
_____recherche d'emploi
_____les autres étudiant-e-s
_____programme individualisé
_____heures flexibles
_____les tests d'orientation
_____ateliers (entrevue, marché du travail, CV, etc.)
_____aide financière pour transport et garderie
_____l'occasion de se familiariser avec des autres cours et des métiers
_____l'occasion d'étudier dans un collège
_____l'occasion d'étudier en français
_____les ordinateurs
_____ma propre motivation

Table II — Ontario Basic Skills (OBS) Program Funding to Colleges

	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	Estimated 1992-93
OBS Revenue	$20,003,775	$19,761,168	$21,585,936	$21,721,803	$21,684,452
FBO Revenue	$0	$151,080	$807,341	$1,426,564	$1,707,538
Subtotal	$20,003,775	$19,912,248	$22,393,277	$23,148,367	$23,391,990
Special Support Allowances (SSAs)	$2,201,344	$2,180,987	$2,744,935	$2,602,957	$2,776,116
Social Assistance Recipients (SARs)	$0	$127,266	$2,012,824	$2,735,899	$2,471,334
Total Revenue	$22,205,119	$22,220,501	$27,151,036	$28,487,223	$28,639,440
Student Contact Hours (SCH)	2,976,808	not available	not available	3,065,754	3,170,661
Revenue per SCH (excluding SSAs)	$6.72			$8.44	$8.16

Sources: Ministry of Education and Ministry of Skills Development

Notes:
- 1988-89 to 1991-92 figures are "actual" amounts. The decrease in 1989-90 is associated with the Fall 1989 academic strike.
- Special Support Allowances (SSAs) are provided to low-income clients to help with costs of child care and transportation.

OBS and FBO programs are offered at the following colleges:

- Algonquin College
- Cambrian College
- Canadore College
- Centennial College
- La Cité collégiale
- Conestoga College
- Confederation College
- Durham College
- Fanshawe College
- George Brown College
- Georgian College
- Humber College
- Lambton College
- Loyalist College
- Mohawk College
- Niagara College
- Northern College
- St. Clair College
- St. Lawrence College
- Sault College
- Seneca College
- Sheridan College
- Sir Sandford Fleming College

The Literacy Branch also has on file sample materials collected for this report including:

- Diagram of OBS program sequences
- Newsletters
- Newspaper clippings
- Orientation materials
- Learning contract (Conestoga)
- Individual training plans (Fanshawe)
- Student testimonials
- Workshop choices
- Ads for OBS/FBO

Contact information for the Literacy Branch is on the back cover.

For additional information about this report contact:

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This publication is also available in French